During the journey to Ras-al-Khaimah, which we undertook in a large sailing dhow, he related some interesting facts about the Mohammedan religion and its *tabus*. The majority of Europeans, he said, often imagined that to the true follower of the Prophet the dog was anathema, not to be touched or mentioned in conversation. Now it was very true that some of the stricter sects of Islam regarded the dog as unclean, but this view was not generally held by the tribes in Oman, who were fond of their dogs, fed and treated them well, and regarded them as household pets. One should, however, always wash one's hands after touching a desert dog. Knowing our pai dog, we unequivocally agreed with this dictum, for these pariahs are never washed and, though his short brown hair looks clean and in good condition, it is usually crawling with lice and other vermin.

The pai is a descendant of the wild dog of the desert, but he has been domesticated for centuries and has all the virtues of the tamed household pet. Although exceedingly timid by disposition, he will bark fiercely at undesirable visitors and makes an excellent watch-dog for that reason, although he rarely attacks and is easily driven off. He is so accustomed to being bullied and stoned by village children, that if one merely bends down and pretends to pick up a stone he will take to his legs with a yelp. He is the laziest creature imaginable and will spend all his days lying in the sun, oblivious of the scores of flies which settle on his eyes and nose, too tired to flick them off. When approached, he will roll over on his back and stick his legs up in the air, as if to say: 'I am defenceless: do with me what you will'.

Pai dogs have very little 'character', are incurably sentimental and lacking in common sense; they have no traffic sense and are constantly run over by cars. Yet in time one grows fond of them. Like most dogs, they are loyal to one master and enjoy nothing so much as to be petted or to lie on a rug and dream. In appearance they resemble the English whippet, but have the head of a terrier, and their run is something of a trot. Their short-haired coats are of a rich golden brown, running to light fawn on the head and belly. The sheikhs breed a special kind of hunting dog, which is fast and cunning and is used for gazelle hunting. These animals are similar to the pai dog, but have sharper faces and long, silky brown hair. They are probably a cross between the pai dog and the saluki.

The sea in the creek was very calm and the gentle breeze scarcely stirred our sails, so that we took nearly twenty minutes to cross the

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

work and not for hunting. The Arab horse is much gentler than the English horse, and is very obedient to knee and thigh, and to the slightest check of the halter and the voice of the rider. They are often ridden without bit or bridle, and have great speed and endurance, being able to keep going for twenty-four hours in the burning sun without water or signs of flagging.

At the sheikh's invitation I mounted a little bay mare and, without saddle, rein or stirrup, set off at full gallop, wheeled her round, and brought her up at mid-career at a dead halt without the slightest difficulty. I felt rather like a man-half of a centaur, not a distinct being. This is due to the Arab system of breaking-in.

Raschid begged to be excused for a few minutes while he made preparations for our hunting trip. Ellis and I had brought a small kit-bag each, containing a change of clothes and toilet requisites, and I had with me a Winchester repeater, kindly lent by the American commanding officer; Ellis had brought an ordinary .303 Service rifle. One of the grooms appeared with Turkish saddles and bits for two of the horses; I had chosen the mare, and Ellis a white stallion. The sheikh's horse, a fine black stallion, was fitted with a sheepskin saddle, the reins being decorated with long black and white tassels, with red cloth and feathers stuck over the head-stall, and a little short, frizzy black plume set between the ears. Raschid told me afterwards that he valued this horse at five thousand rupees.

Other servants brought out the folded tents, cooking utensils, rifles and food required for the expedition, and in a short time we were ready to start. The party consisted of Sheikh Raschid, Hussein, a secretary, Ellis and myself, a groom, and two heavily-armed guards, and we set off at a smart canter from the palace in the direction of Mahrid, with two of the sheikh's Saluki hunting dogs at our heels. In this part of the desert the surface was quite smooth and free of rocks, and riding was most pleasant. The heat was intense, however, and we had to wear sun-glasses, as the glare from the sand was most dazzling; apart from the usual short shrub there was little vegetation, and we had ridden for about five miles before we came to the large valley where the gazelle is found.

This valley is about four miles long and three miles wide, with steep, grass-covered banks on either side; the vegetation is lush, with camel grass, tamarisk, clover and wild flowers growing in profusion. Under a clump of neam trees we found a little stream trickling down from the rocks, and we tethered our horses to a

branch while Raschid discussed a plan of campaign with Hussein and the groom. The gazelle, which travels in herds, comes to the valley to graze and drink when the sun is beginning to go down. Owing to their light fawn colouring, which makes them almost invisible in the sandy desert, they are conspicuous against the green vegetation, and seldom venture into the valleys in the daytime. They are quite small creatures, about three feet six inches in height, a little larger than the tiny Malayan barking-deer, with short, curved horns; the coat is a rich golden-brown, and the belly fawn to white.

Raschid directed the groom and the two guards, who are trained trackers and hunters, to take up vantage points on a *tel*, or hill, above the valley; from there they would have a wide view of the surrounding desert and of the valley itself. They went off on their horses, followed by the dogs, and were soon out of sight. While we were waiting Ellis and I cleaned our guns and took a photograph of Raschid and his friends. After nearly half an hour a low, whistling note, rather like the cry of a curlew, reached us. Raschid, informing us it was the signal that gazelle had been sighted, jumped up with alacrity and mounted his horse, telling us to follow him. We dashed up the side of the hill just in time to see a small herd of gazelle in the distance springing from rock to rock with amazing speed.

We spurred on our horses and, at Raschid's direction, spread out in fan-shape order so as to cover all sides of the valley; it was apparent that the herd was making for the open desert, so the beaters and dogs had gone ahead to try and round them off. Apparently they were successful although the gazelle were now invisible to our eyes, for the sheikh suddenly dismounted and we followed suit. After a short wait we heard the thunder of hoofs and, peeping from behind the screen of camel-thorn behind which we were concealed, we saw the herd, by now very much scattered, approaching in our direction.

They were about two hundred yards away when the leader suddenly wheeled, as though he had scented danger, and the whole herd began to turn off at right-angles to our hiding place. Raschid raised his rifle and fired, but there was so much dust that we did not see the result. I considered it to be a long shot and would not risk firing myself. When we stood up and looked around us the herd had disappeared.

We rode back to the place where we had first halted and were

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224 met by the trackers. To Raschid's delight they carried a fine buck on their saddles. It was a full-grown specimen nearly four feet high with exceptionally clear markings. The shot had struck the pelvic bone, glanced off and gone straight through the heart. The groom skinned the animal and then proceeded to cut up the meat into neat sections, putting the liver and offal on one side.

The sun was now beginning to sink towards the horizon although the light was still good and we set out for a final ride into a nearby ravine where the trackers had sighted another herd. They were too quick for us, however, being agile and sure-footed among the rocks, whereas our horses were unaccustomed to this terrain. My own mare stumbled twice and I was left behind. The herd was so perfectly camouflaged in the sand that it was extremely difficult to follow them beyond a hundred yards or so, although their course was betrayed by the dust which they kicked up. We fired several shots but the range was too great and we returned to our encampment just as the first stars were twinkling overhead.

The trackers had put up the tents and lit a fire of brushwood; although we were in a protected hollow it was extremely cold and we were glad of the blaze. Hussein lent me an *abbas*, which I wrapped around my bare arms and knees, and then busied himself with helping to prepare supper, which consisted of roast gazelle, boiled rice with ghee butter, chipatties, dates and coffee—a delicious meal. Hussein, who had brought his falcon-hawk with him, had gone off on a houbari hunt while we were after gazelle, and had caught a large cock. It belonged to the bustard family and looked rather like a small turkey, but we decided that roast gazelle was good enough for us, so it was handed over to the trackers.

The sheikh had given Ellis and I a small tent to ourselves. After supper we took a short stroll into the starlit valley while Raschid and his friends sat over the fire, smoking and discussing the hunt. The night was full of little cries and a distant, eerie howl that sounded like a wolf's. We turned in, covered ourselves with a goats'-hair blanket, and were soon fast asleep.

We rose at sunrise and washed in the stream, which was ice-cold. Before folding their tents our Arab hosts performed their toilets and said their prayers, kneeling in the sand towards the East; they then prepared breakfast. It was a simple meal of dates and camels' milk, and when we had finished it we mounted our horses and took the desert road to Sharjah.

000 A few days later Sheikh Raschid, Hussein, and the sheikh's